



Williams at DATCP for Thirty Years and Counting

Release Date: November 7, 2012

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This story is one of a series of feature stories highlighting DATCP employees and the programs they work in.

MADISON – Bob Williams has never had a day he didn't want to come to work. Thirty-one years ago Williams was hired by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) to coordinate county fairs and work with the different commodity groups. Though he retired once in 2000, he came back part-time after only three months to hold the position he still holds today – the state's County Fair Coordinator.

"When fair organizers think of DATCP, they think of Bob Williams. He has been the face and personality of DATCP to many people over his long career," said Secretary Ben Brancel. "His knowledge of fairs and relationships with people across the state are invaluable. He provides a tremendous service to Wisconsin by ensuring the state's fun and educational fairs are the best possible."

Williams still remembers the first fair he attended as a DATCP employee in Dodge County. His job was to survey the fair by completing a form, highlighting successes and offering suggestions. The next year, he bought a camera to take pictures of things that were good and not so good at each fair including displays and signage.

"When I first gave a presentation about Wisconsin fairs featuring these pictures, I called it – The Good, The Bad and The Ugly," explained Williams. "There was a lot of ugly at that time, because many problem areas at fairs are easy not to notice when you look at them year after year."

Williams traveled the state and even the nation with these presentations offering suggestions on how to improve each fair for its customer, the fairgoer. Now when Williams does these presentations, he highlights the fantastic.

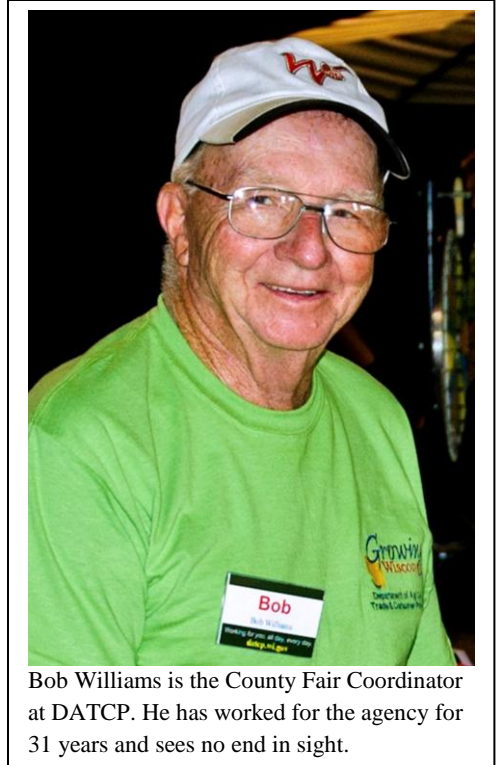
"The quality of fairs has improved so much over the years," said Williams. "It is a good problem to have that it is hard to find the ugly. The fairs do an excellent job."

As fair coordinator, Williams worked on a state level to increase fair promotion by developing the annual entertainment brochure in 1993 that features each fair. This brochure is still done each year, available online and in printed form at the state's travel centers.

It is good for the fairs that Williams doesn't mind driving. He travels thousands of miles across the state each year and may visit three fairs a day. He typically spends about two hours at each fair to survey the event and complete his report.

Williams is the person you may see working the giant frying pan at fairs and events across the state. He is also the one who helped bring the famous Veggie Races to the Wisconsin State Fair.

"I love fairs and even have a withdrawal in September as they are winding down. When the sounds of the fair season start, my adrenaline gets pumping," said Williams. "Fairs are fun because the people



Bob Williams is the County Fair Coordinator at DATCP. He has worked for the agency for 31 years and sees no end in sight.

who work them are usually volunteers and people who want to be there. I have made so many friends over the years.”

Williams’ work expands outside of the state’s borders. He enjoys learning from other states by participating in the International Association of Fairs and Expositions. He served as President four times for the National Association of Agricultural Fair Agencies.

He has always enjoyed seeing children’s fair projects because of his background in teaching. Williams grew up on a vegetable farm in Montello. He worked on the farm and in the grocery business before teaching at Montello High School. Williams has a bachelor’s and master’s degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

His family is very important to him and all live close-by in Wisconsin. He has four children, eight grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. His wife Ruth of 53 years passed away in 2005.

Williams has been recognized by many organizations over the years. Most recently, he was given an Impact Award from the Wisconsin Agricultural and Life Sciences Alumni Association. Williams was even the Grand Marshall of the Warrens Cranberry Festival, but the award he speaks most proudly of is from the University of Wisconsin-Madison College of Agricultural & Life Sciences.

“My father received the Honorary Recognition Award in 1938, and in 2004 I was given the same award,” said Williams. “I will always remember that.”

A question many may ask Williams is what his favorite fair food is. The answer: a hot dog.

“Hot dogs are easy to eat while driving to the next fair down the road, and most importantly it allows me to visit the local 4-H fair stand,” added Williams. “I enjoy seeing the children learning from the adults and having fun. That’s what fairs are all about.”

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